

Duo pick Asia's highest volcano for charity trek

Funds raised to benefit kids with cancer

By **ANDREA NG**

BARELY a year after returning from a 220km charity trek through the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal, best friends Ashik Ashokan and Ashok Kumar, both 24, will climb Asia's highest volcano in Iran to raise funds for the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF).

The pair, who have also scaled Mount Kerinci in Indonesia and trekked through the jungles of southern Thailand, aim to reach the 5,670m peak of Mount Damavand next month, without porters or guides.

They will brave the extreme temperatures of the Iranian summer – ranging from 45 deg C in the day to minus 10 deg C at night – and the sulphuric fumes emitted from the volcano.

The two decided to embark on their second charity expedition in February,

after meeting children with cancer during a volunteer stint with the CCF.

Mr Ashik, a third-year communications and new media student at the National University of Singapore, said: "Many of us had a blessed childhood."

Mr Ashok, a business undergraduate at the Singapore Institute of Management, added: "We could play what we wanted, eat what we liked, but these children can't."

The going has been tough. The duo have to juggle school, training and fund-raising. Still, they have raised \$35,000 of their \$50,000 goal.

Property and facilities management company Mini Environment Service has agreed to cover all costs of the expedition, and North Face Singapore will sponsor the climbing equipment.

The pair train three times a week by running for an hour or up and down an



Best friends Ashik Ashokan (left) and Ashok Kumar taking a picture of the logo for their cause while trekking through the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal last year. PHOTO: HEART2CLIMB

HDB block 10 times with a 17kg load. Mr Ashok joked: "I am afraid when I see a flight of stairs now."

At the end of the month, the pair will travel to Manali, India, to spend three weeks acclimatising to the high altitude. They hope to conquer Mount Damavand within five to seven days.

"My mum threatened to burn my passport when she first heard we were going for a second round," Mr Ashok, the youngest of three sons, recalled. "She thought we were done when we returned from Nepal last year."

That trek raised \$50,000 for the So-

ciety for the Physically Disabled, which helps those with disabilities.

His mother has since come around. His father, Mr P. Ananthan, 63, said: "He knows what is good and bad, and he is doing his training."

Dr Kumaran Rasappan, who climbed Mount Everest for charity, agreed: "I have been advising them on their training schedule, preparations to take and what to expect. They have the knowledge and the experience."

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To support the duo's efforts, visit www.heart2climb.com